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Children get Bicknell award for kind acts

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DUXBURY

Ryan Miller makes it a point to say hello to a new kid in school.

Courtney Vercollone knows how important it is to include people who feel left out.

They're both Duxbury Middle School seventh-graders, and neither claims to pay special attention to being nice. But their classmates have noticed Ryan's and Courtney's kindness and voted for the pair to receive the Tracy Bicknell Humanitarian Award.

Yesterday, Ryan and Courtney were honored at the annual seventh-grade awards assembly. Wendy Bicknell presented the award, which is a tribute to her daughter, Tracy, a seventh-grader at the school who ended her own life at age 12 in 1992.

Bicknell described Tracy as a likable, person who enjoyed tennis, softball, cross-stitching and art.

"Tracy was fair to all of her friends, always had an upbeat attitude and never had negative things to say about other people," Bicknell said. "She always had a smile on her face, and she just always seemed to try to include others."

It's still a mystery to Bicknell that the same girl who was swimming in the pool with her friends at 5 p.m. on a Thursday in September was dead later that evening.

"She was a fun, all-around happy kid," Bicknell said. "When you see the outcome, you say 'How can that be?' It's a mystery."

"She had a really good, good life with a lot of friends and a lot of family and a lot of support. But something was bothering her that made her do this. Some answers we'll never know."

The Tracy Bicknell Humanitarian Award was established to remember Tracy and to honor children who exemplified her qualities of kindness, thoughtfulness and caring, her mother said.

Each year, the seventh-grade class chooses a boy and girl to win the award and receive a \$1,000 college

scholarship when they graduate from high school. The money is donated by family, friends and by people who never met Tracy.

The first award was given in 1993 to Meghan O'Brien, a neighborhood friend of Tracy's, who is now studying at Harvard University.

The second winner, William Chandler, a recent Duxbury High School graduate bound for Babson College, presented yesterday's awards to Ryan and Courtney.

"Being nice is reciprocal because not only does it reflect on surrounding people, but in turn it reflects back on that one person, as well," Chandler said.

Bicknell said a major aim of the award is to make children think twice before they say mean words or alienate a classmate who is different.

"Kindness and caring are so important in the world, today more than ever," she said. "We need to foster this and show the kids how important it is. To have their peers receive this award and to be honored and respected for it in front of parents and teachers sends a powerful message."

Bicknell also would like to send a message to parents who may not notice signs that their children may be depressed and despondent. Though she doesn't know why Tracy ended her life, Bicknell said it is possible that Tracy had some type of clinical depression.

"It's something I didn't see, and something may have set her off, but parents should be looking for mood swings or lethargic kids, or kids that don't seem motivated every once in awhile," she said. "There were times (Tracy) was like that. I don't think someone does this just because they had a bad day."

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Wendy Bicknell, center, awarded scholarships, in her daughter's memory, to seventh-graders Courtney Vercollone and Ryan Miller.

Two who care

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Wendy Bicknell,
Tracy's mother